Training and Winning Against the Threat

by Captain James D. Maxwell

The current situation in Iraq facing the U.S. Army should trouble every single leader in the force. We could potentially face a very different enemy in Iraq in 2003 than we faced in 1991. Iraqi leaders can read *The Bear Went Over the Mountain, The Other Side of the Mountain,* and *Blackhawk Down.*[1] Our actions in Afghanistan have been closely watched. The first thing we need to do, as leaders, is accept that we could very well face this threat. The second thing we must do as leaders is *demand* the tools we need to train. Money, equipment, facilities, and time: professional leaders telling their boss, "Sir I need …" instead of, "Sir, we'll make it happen." Leaders need to get on a war footing and focus their energies on quickly adjusting to fighting on a nonlinear, noncontiguous battlefield. The third thing we need to do is evaluate the tasks we train and adjust our mission essential task lists (METLs) to reflect the most likely threat we will face in the near future.

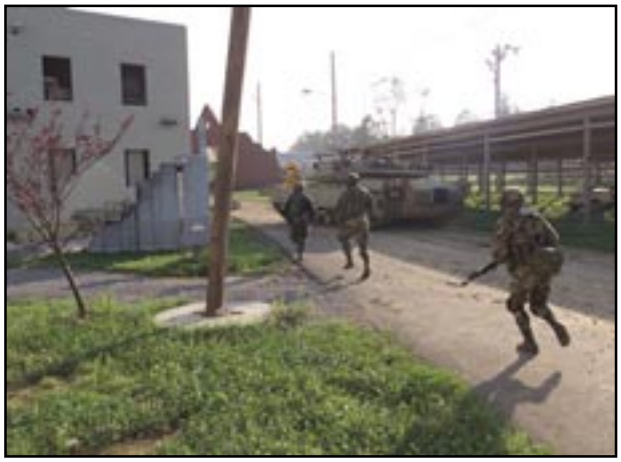
We have accepted that we will probably not fight our next fight in Iraq with two corps conducting a huge envelopment, following the luxury of the air force isolating the enemy for 3 weeks prior to a decisive 100-hour ground fight. Now we must change our training mentality, evaluate our METL, and focus training to operate on a nonlinear and noncontiguous battlefield.

Evaluate and Change Mission Essential Task Lists

Commanders face an enormous challenge today — quickly restructuring their METL to reflect the threat we will face in our next war. At the brigade combat team (BCT) level, movement to contact is a task in which we must remain proficient and trained. How we execute that movement to contact needs to change. Collective tasks at subordinate levels must reflect the threat on a nonlinear, noncontiguous battlefield, with an enemy using restricted and urban terrain to maximize his effectiveness and prohibit our ability to freely maneuver our mounted forces. Furthermore, METLs must reflect the protection and movement of combat service support (CSS) assets. BCT and task force (TF) commanders must focus company/team (CO/TM) commanders on using light infantry, attack helicopters, and coordinating close air support (CAS). CO/TM commanders need to train with these assets to increase proficiency, knowledge of capabilities and limitations, and allow tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) to develop at their levels. Since the decisive actions in a nonlinear, noncontiguous environment occur at TF and CO/TM levels, commanders must evaluate and focus their METLs to reflect the threat and environment.

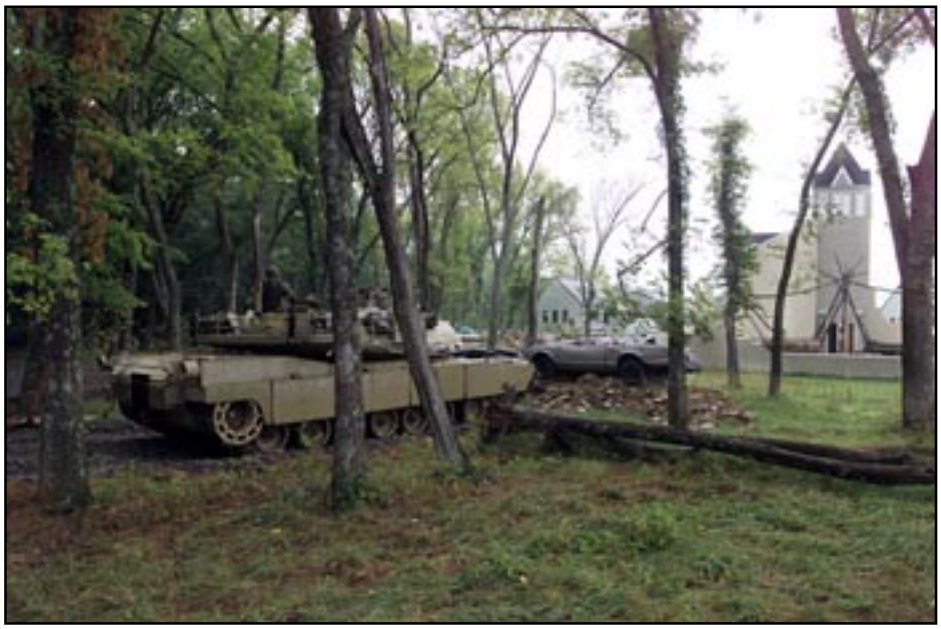
Using Zussman

By not rotating units to Zussman Urban Combat Training Site at Fort Knox, Kentucky, we are wasting a huge training resource. What are you waiting for? Requisition 36 M1A1s and 36 M2A3s,



"By not rotating units to Zussman Urban Combat Training Site at Fort Knox, Kentucky, we are wasting a huge training resource."

Photos by Robert L. Stevenson



"The principles of fighting in urban terrain are similar to fighting in restricted terrain. Both cause commanders to think of the threat three dimensionally. The fights at the NTC need not be in Central Corridor. Fights need to be in the Northern Corridor, Hidden Valley, Bike-Beacon, and TV Hill areas, using the restricted terrain and difficult passes. Company commanders and platoon leaders are going to lead men though the decisive actions, requiring the training to prepare for them."

hire contractors to maintain and operate a draw yard, and dedicate observer controllers and an OPFOR company. Using Zussman gets battalion and company commanders fighting in an urban environment today. We know the threats we are going to face; we need to train to face them. Two-week rotations would allow the maximum number of units to train.

We are going to fight together, let's train together. Attach Rangers, infantrymen, and other special operators to build TTPs. We need not learn through bloodshed. One of the problems the Soviets faced in Afghanistan, and one we faced in Somalia, was predictability. This predictability is, in part, generated by failure to develop several sets of TTPs applicable to different task organizations capable of accomplishing the same task. We should build TTPs that units can use in several situations, with several different task organizations, and remain flexible and innovative in dangerous situations.

Train soldiers and leaders to fight and win. We already know that actions in the contemporary operating environment (COE) will be small-unit action, with decisive action taking place at the task force level and below. Our training plans should reflect the environment and threat as outlined in the COE. One tool we have at our disposal is Zussman. The facility is on the Chief of Armor's turf! We hold the trump card! We are using Zussman to train fresh second lieutenants attending the Armor Officers Basic (AOB) Course, an audience with hardly a grasp on maneuver to begin with, let alone the COE. Zussman should be used to train CO/TM commanders from Fort Hood, re-enforced with light infantrymen and Apaches operationally controlled for fire support. I understand and appreciate the importance of introducing young officers to the difficulties of urban combat because I participated in a 2-day exercise with AOB students, but my appreciation for having the facility available for the leaders on my left and right as CO/TM commanders is infinitely greater.

Change NTC Rotations

I may not be the Grand Dalai Lama of Mohavia, but I have been in enough fights and have seen enough to have opinions and suggestions. The NTC is working hard to create military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) villages, build a railhead, expand the training area, retool the OPFOR, and a million other things. My suggestions focus more on tailoring BCTs to fight the threat we read and hear about daily.

Task Organization. BCT task organization needs to reflect the most effective task organization for an urban or restricted terrain environment and fighting small, decentralized units focused on killing Americans. A BCT needs to train with one mechanized TF, one armored TF, and one light air-assault capable infantry battalion. Without infantrymen protecting mounted forces, and without mounted forces reacting quickly to protect light infantry, many Soviet soldiers died in Afghanistan.

The BCT needs a robust engineer package and an Apache company or platoon attached. "That is not the way we fight." Clear your head sir, we are not fighting the Soviet hoard or the Gulf War you fought as a CO/TM commander. We are fighting platoon- and company-sized elements. Attack helicopters, supporting air assault infantry units and mounted forces in decisive fights seemed to work with the Soviets, but it took them 5 years and many wasted soldiers to figure it out.

We are training mounted BCT commanders to use infantrymen, gain an understanding of their capabilities, and fully realize their utility. How many readers have been killed by TF Angel or TF Destroyer at the NTC? We are also training TF commanders to operate on a nonlinear, noncontiguous battlefield with the full spectrum of capabilities available for use in a fight. TF commanders today have spent their careers fighting against an enemy on a linear battlefield. TTPs developed over the years are no less valid in a different threat environment; however, they do need to be re-evaluated and validated at one of the three combat training centers. Most importantly, CO/TM commanders and platoon leaders train against a realistic threat within a task organization similar to one in which they will fight in combat. CO/TM commanders will effectively employ light infantrymen and use attack helicopters in a direct support role, causing the enemy to fight in several directions and ultimately lose.

Terrain. The principles of fighting in urban terrain are similar to fighting in restricted terrain. Both cause commanders to think of the threat three dimensionally. The fights at the NTC need not be in Central Corridor. Fights need to be in the Northern Corridor, Hidden Valley, Bike-Beacon, and TV Hill areas, using the restricted terrain and difficult passes. Company commanders and platoon leaders are going to lead men though the decisive actions, requiring the training to prepare for them. Rephrasing that, "Sir, this is how I need to train my company. I want to fight and win. I want to train hard. I want to blink today so I don't bleed tomorrow." For example, Iraqi forces have ambushed and destroyed a supply convoy in Al-Awshitz pass along main supply route (MSR) 3. Reports indicate between 60 and 80 enemy soldiers, armed with rocket-propelled grenades and medium to heavy machine guns. TF 2-12 attacks to clear Iraqi forces via Al-Awshitz pass NLT N+4 to reopen coalition lines of communication.

Is this an unrealistic scenario? No! This one is taken directly from the vignettes in *The Other Side of the Mountain.*[2] How would you fight this? I suggest infantry units conducting an air assault to isolate the enemy by deploying on the flanks and rear to deny his ability to re-enforce and escape, closely followed by the tanks leading the mechanized infantry into contact, supporting the deployment of the dismounted infantry sections, adding synchronized attack helicopters to cause the enemy to fight in yet another direction, and providing fire support to the ground force commander. By using one light infantry company to clear one ridge, sup-

ported by tanks and Bradleys, the dismounted infantry suppressing and fixing the enemy along the second ridge, supported by tanks and Bradleys, and both efforts supported by a section of attack helicopters, we are fighting a combined-arms fight at the CO/TM level in restricted terrain, with a determined enemy holding the key and dominant terrain. Can TF commanders execute this fight today? Most definitely. The true difficulty lies in the symphony of maneuver elements, fire support, and command and control. Can company commanders execute this fight today? Can platoon leaders? I would bet the farm the OPFOR would meet its objectives. Would we regain the pass and reopen the MSR? Yes, but we must keep the objective of the enemy in mind: kill as many Americans as possible. I want to train to avoid that.

In talking with a senior officer attending the Armor Officers Pre-Command Course, who is now a brigade commander at Fort Hood, the comment was made that the brigade commander's job is easy, while the job of his subordinates is definitely more difficult. The days of brigade commanders pointing to a grid square and directing CAS in support of the TF tasked with being the advance guard of the BCT main body in a movement to contact is temporarily on hold. The threat we face dictates the way we train, not the other way around. The enemy always has a voice in how the day goes.

Convoy Security. During your upcoming NTC rotation, position your brigade support area near McClean or Nelson Lake and try to get it through the Northern Corridor to the Flagpole in one piece. Would a group of 23 Iraqi soldiers, each armed with an AK-47 rifle, and equipped with eight RPG-7s, attack the CO/TM with tanks and Bradleys, or would they attack the fuel and supply trucks? We have clearly stated and accepted that we will probably fight on a noncontiguous, nonlinear battlefield. A huge challenge will be CSS operations. One of those five fights at the NTC needs to be a forward support battalion (FSB) displacement security mission. A brigade commander may need to use one-third or more of his combat power to protect his CSS movements from one area of operations to another. Noncontiguous dictates, rather than implies, that the BCT commander will not move unhindered between sequential areas of operations. The enemy will attack soft-skinned vehicles for two reasons — the American inside is easier to kill and the probability of his survival is far greater. This is going to be a huge challenge for us since we, as leaders, are accustomed to operating on a linear, contiguous battlefield. The challenge of protecting our CSS assets is one we should start training for immediately.

The FSB and forward support companies (FSC) do not have the ability to protect themselves with active security measures. The CSS community has a service-oriented mindset, which complicates the problem. Their focus is the provision of goods and services, not necessarily the security of the units and teams providing them. When focused on convoy security, CSS units use passive measures, rather than active — their role on the battlefield is not reconnaissance and security. Think of it in terms of passive air defense measures versus active air defense measures. Our responsibility as maneuver commanders is the active security of our CSS assets. For every soldier assigned to an FSB with a rifle in hand, there is one less soldier processing parts, turning wrenches, or coordinating with maneuver units to ensure we are sustained to execute combat operations. We may laugh and say, "It's not my problem," but the problem definitely becomes ours if we want fuel, ammo, food, maintenance support, and water.

Maneuver commanders must create conditions for their battlefield operating systems to function under optimal conditions, and we must admit that we habitually assume support will always be there. The task is very difficult. Keep in mind that we, as an Army, have trained for decades to conduct CSS operations on a linear and contiguous battlefield, that the enemy prefers to strike soft-skinned vehicles versus tanks and Bradleys, and the trend of continued centralization of maintenance and supply assets into FSCs. Training this task, and the associated collective tasks, becomes more difficult to synchronize, resource, and execute. Urgency to develop functional TTPs given the COE is needed from both the combat arms and CSS communities. We have to protect our logistical tails. This requires that we develop, test, and validate TTPs at the NTC.

As leaders, we are ultimately responsible for the execution of combat operations and we must train ourselves to operate in an environment to which we are not accustomed. We have to remove ourselves from our comfort zones. We must focus our unit's training plans to win fights on a nonlinear and noncontiguous battlefield. We must train our subordinate leaders to operate in the same nonlinear and noncontiguous environment, and focus their training plans for success. We must force the combat support and CSS communities to train and operate in a manner capable of optimal effectiveness and utilization within our training plans. Lastly, we must provide the facilities and opportunities to our subordinate commanders and leaders to train their units on a nonlinear and noncontiguous battlefield, with the full difficulty of protecting and sustaining their units and lines of communication, with an emphasis on using CAS and light infantry. The only way we can win the war tomorrow is to train for it today. Right now, somewhere, in some desert, someone is thinking of doing one thing and one thing only — killing an American.

Notes

[1]Lester W. Grau and David M. Glantz, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*, Frank Cass Publishers, London, UK, original Cass publication 1998, 2001 republication; Ali Ahmad Jalaili, *Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War,* Frank Cass and Company, London, December 2002; Mark Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, Atlantic Monthly Press, New York, NY, March 1999.

[2]Jalaili, *Other Side of the Mountain.*

CPT James D. Maxwell is currently a student at the Armor Captains Career Course, Fort Knox, KY. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY. He has served in various command and staff positions, including scout platoon leader and troop executive officer, 4-7 Cavalry, Camp Garry Owen, Korea; troop executive officer and squadron liaison officer, 1/11 Armored Cavalry Regiment; and troop executive officer, HHT, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA. Upon completing the Armor Captains Career Course, he will be assigned to the 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX.